

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center

Dear partner in school safety,

In collaboration with the California Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Healthy Students (OSHS) and Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center would like to provide you the following information on planning for individuals with disabilities or access and functional needs (D/AFN). Within this response, you will find an introduction to planning for individuals with D/AFN, information on how to plan for this population using the six-step planning process, and resources from OSHS, REMS TA Center, and federal partners.

Introduction to Planning for Individuals with D/AFN

Planning for emergency events at schools and school districts should be undertaken with the whole school community in mind. This includes meeting the needs of children and individuals with D/AFN, as well as those from religiously, racially, and ethnically diverse backgrounds, and people with limited English proficiency.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) utilizes seven Key Principles to guide the agency's programs and activities related to people with disabilities. These principles, which can be tailored to help students with D/AFN in a K-12 school community, are:

1. **Equal Access:** People with disabilities must be able to access the same programs and services as the general population.
2. **Physical Access:** People with disabilities must be able to access locations where emergency programs and services are provided.
3. **Access to Effective Communication:** People with disabilities must be given the same information provided to the general population. Communications with people with disabilities must be as effective as communications with others.
4. **Inclusion:** People with disabilities have the right to participate in and receive the benefits of emergency programs, services, and activities.
5. **Integration:** Emergency programs, services, and activities typically must be provided in an integrated setting.
6. **Program Modifications:** People with disabilities must have equal access to programs and services, which may entail modifications.
7. **No Charge:** People with disabilities may not be charged to cover the costs of measures necessary to ensure equal access and nondiscrimination.

Planning for Individuals with D/AFN

Protocols or courses of action that describe how a person with a D/AFN will respond in an emergency can be created through the [six-step planning process](#) described in the [Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#) (*School Guide*). The guide aligns and builds upon years of emergency planning work by the Federal government. It is the first joint product of the U.S. Departments of Education; Justice, led by the Federal Bureau of Investigation; Homeland Security, led by the Federal Emergency Management Agency; and Health and Human Services.

As this planning process relates to a student with D/AFN:

Step 1: Form a Collaborative Planning Team. Planning for threats and hazards is best performed through a multidisciplinary school team working with community partners. The planning team will likely be comprised of school personnel (administrators, educators, school psychologist, facility manager, etc.), a school district representative, a local emergency management representative, and first responders. Later, when specific response protocols are created for individuals with D/AFN, the team can seek the input from others with expertise or experience in inclusive planning, the person with the need, and their caregiver(s).

Step 2: Understand the Situation. The planning team identifies threats and hazards that are likely to affect the school and surrounding community.

Step 3: Determine Goals and Objectives. Goals can be created that identify desired outcomes for before, during, and after the threats and hazards identified in step 2 and cross-cutting activities, such as communication and recovery. Objectives can then be created, which are specific and measurable actions to achieve those goals.

Step 4: Plan Development [Identifying Courses of Action]. In this step, the planning team identifies courses of action for accomplishing each of the objectives identified in step 3—these address the who, what, when, where, why and how.

When it comes to developing courses of action specifically for individuals with D/AFN, the planning team can seek input from a school district or school disability specialist, the student or their representatives, teachers, parents or caregivers, and general counsel. This diversity of representation can help ensure the unique needs of individuals are met in a variety of scenarios. Parents, guardians, and teachers are great resources for consultation during the planning process as they have a deeper understanding of the unique needs of each child. And, input from first responders will help identify what courses of actions are best for a person with D/AFN based on factors such as resource availability, the locality, and the individual's level of ability.

Step 5: Plan Preparation, Review, and Approval: Now, the EOP is written to include courses of action for the threats and hazards previously identified, reviewed by school/school district leadership and community partners, and approved.

In parallel, the planning team can build on existing social and academic plans for students with D/AFN. If the school EOP establishes individualized procedures for a student that extend services already in place, the school is more likely to implement them successfully in the event of an emergency. By law, schools must establish individualized education programs (IEPs) for each student with a disability to promote their successful inclusion in classroom and non-classroom settings. The IEP details the accommodations, modifications and services that the student uses, such as assigned seating, early dismissal from classes for timely transitions, and large-print study materials. These accommodations are based on the student's strengths and needs and are selected for their capacity to promote that student's success.

Individualized courses of action for an emergency for each student with a D/AFN can be included in the student's IEP and teachers can be encouraged to discuss emergency procedures with parents or guardians as part of an IEP meeting or other review.

Step 6: Plan Implementation and Maintenance. In this final step, the EOP is shared with stakeholders. These individuals should be trained on the plan and their responsibilities. Students with D/AFN and their caregivers need to:

- Understand the emergency response protocols, including those that are unique to them;
- Learn to communicate with first responders (in case of a separation from caregivers);
- Be able to communicate specifics about needs; and
- Use any necessary tools such as personal response plans, evacuation equipment, or visual aid.

Exercises, such as lockdown and evacuation drills, should also be conducted and include the whole school community—including teachers, staff, and administration. This not only ensures they know how to respond, but it models to students the importance of taking the appropriate actions. Community partners can be great resources, providing assistance with training and feedback during exercises. The basic EOP and any annexes—as well as specific information in IEPs on how students with D/AFN should respond in an emergency—should also be regularly reviewed to ensure the information stays current.

OSHS and REMS TA Center Resources

OSHS and the REMS TA Center have several resources on inclusive planning for school districts and schools (public and nonpublic). Of note is that while we provide specific resources for meeting the needs of those with D/AFN in an emergency, our resources on other topics (for example, [Information Sharing](#)) also include planning considerations for this population.

- [Addressing Access and Functional Needs \(AFN\) in School and Higher Education Emergency Operations Plans \(EOPs\)](#). This archived Webinar provides an overview of AFN integration within schools and Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs), as well as specific information on and examples of inclusive preparedness planning in schools and IHEs. Also included on the Webinar page is a [Resource List](#) that provides links to general resources, laws and regulations, tools and trainings, alerts and notifications, and special topics. You can also find a [Fact Sheet](#) on the topic, which provides examples of inclusive planning in a variety of areas and additional resources.
- [Ensuring Access and Functional Needs are Met Before, During, and After Emergency Incidents](#). This topic-specific Web page compiles resources from ED, OSHS, REMS TA Center, and federal agency partners on the topic of planning for individuals with D/AFN.
- [Integrating Students with Special Needs and Disabilities into Emergency Response and Crisis Management Planning](#). This publication provides some suggestions on how to better ensure the needs of students with D/AFN are integrated into planning efforts, including through partnering with a disability specialist. Several strategies are provided as well as additional resources.
- [Integrating the Needs of Students and Staff with Disabilities and Other Access and Functional Needs](#). This Specialized Training Package includes instructions, a PowerPoint with speaker notes, and a Resource Guide on integrating the needs of students, staff, and teachers with D/AFN into each step of the emergency planning process. The information can be used by individuals to self-teach, or to train others, such as in professional development opportunities.
- [Access and Functional Needs Community of Practice \(CoP\) Forum](#). The CoP is an online forum where practitioners of emergency management at schools, school districts, state education agencies, IHEs, and their community partners can come together to share ideas, experiences, lessons learned, and engage with one another on the topics of safety, security, and emergency management. This forum houses resources related to addressing access and functional needs in emergency management planning and emergency operations plan development.
- [Guidelines for Developing an Emergency Evacuation Plan That Includes Individuals with Disabilities](#). This resource, from the District of Columbia Public Schools/Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization, is available in the REMS TA Center's [Tool Box](#). The publication provides definitions and information such as determining needs, providing training, and practicing emergency evacuation procedures. The Tool Box is an online repository of tools and resources developed by practitioners like you in the field and pertinent to the needs of school and higher ed practitioners as they engage in the process of school and higher ed emergency management planning.

Federal Resources

In addition to the above information, we identified a couple of federal Websites you may want to review that provide additional resources to help with inclusive planning. These include:

- [Office of Disability Integration and Coordination](#) (FEMA). This Office provides guidance, tools, methods, and strategies to help establish equal physical, program and effective communication access to people with disabilities. FEMA has a Regional Disability Integration Specialist in each of its 10 regions who can provide support for disability-inclusive emergency planning. For information on how to contact your FEMA Regional Contact, click [here](#).
- [Disability Resources](#) (U.S. Department of Labor). This Web page provides resources on a variety of topics. Under the subheading *Emergency Preparedness*, information is available on preparing for emergencies for people with D/AFN.

We hope that you find the reference material identified above helpful as you help plan for the needs of students with D/AFN. Please do not hesitate to contact the REMS TA Center with any additional questions on the information provided above or to continue the conversation. Please also feel free to forward this document and our contact information to other stakeholders. For additional resources and information on school and district preparedness, including safety, security, and emergency management, individuals can visit the TA Center [Website](#) or call us toll-free at 1-855-781-REMS [7367]. We also encourage you to follow us on [Twitter](#) for the latest information on school safety, security, and emergency management from OSHS, the REMS TA Center, and our federal partners.

Sincerely,

The OSHS and REMS TA Center Team



If you have questions or need additional assistance, please contact the REMS TA Center at
(855) 781-REMS (7367) or info@remstacenter.org.
[Twitter](#) @remstacenter <https://rem.ed.gov>

